

Even though Kielce and its nearest surroundings could never rival the nineteenth-century Łódź or Katowice in terms of industrial development and technical civilisation, we did have foreign specialists who shaped local industry.

On that score, arms manufacturing is well worth a mention. This was the field of Giovanni Geronimo Caccia and Giovanni Gibboni at Samsonów: they produced firearms and ammunition for horse artillery. In the seventeenth century, arms manufactories were established at localities such as Białogon, Cmielów, Denków, Gowarzęd, Kielce, Końskie, Kozienice, Michałów, Niemirów, Odrowąż, Ostrowiec, Pomyków, Przysucha, Przyborowice, Samsonów, Staszów and Suchedniów.

Much is known about the specialists from Saxony and Great Britain, who from 1816 onwards worked at Alexander's Steel Mill (Machinery Building Plant) at Białogon. Few people know, however, that at Białogon and at Samsonów the machines imported from England were installed by Philippe de Girard, who originally worked in the mining industry in Congress Poland. His name was linked primarily to Żyrardów (formerly Wola Guzowska). There he built a mechanised weaving mill and plant at Marymont, where he applied a mechanical flax spinner. He also conducted hydrotechnical works at Sielpia, clearing the Kamienna river. During the November 1830 Insurrection, he constructed a machine for gunstock production, which did not come into use until the year 1845, at the Saint Petersburg arsenal.

The November Insurrection was also an interesting period in arms production in the Old Polish Basin, at one of its oldest factories – the Białogon Plant. At that time, weapons were made and repaired here for the Polish army, which can be learnt from archival correspondence, preserved until today at the National Museum in Kielce. It contains letters from Wilhelm Colette, a newcomer from Gdańsk. In the years 1830-1831, as he puts it in a petition to the authorities concerning a return of amounts due, he was forced by Ksawery Drucki-Lubecki (Minister of Treasury) and Piotr Michałowski (a well-known pain-

Ours was not a Homogeneous Community

Much is said and written on the subject of multiculturalism. Museum exhibitions and multimedia shows are offered to the public, their principal objective being to disseminate information on our relations with foreigners.



Photo: Archives

ter of military scenes, head of steel-works and mining councillor) to “establish new factories here, in Polish lands, being under personal threat of loss of life should I fail to acquit myself of the said obligation, so I set up the said factories at sixteen locations.” He goes on to list those: Suchedniów, Berezów, Starachowice, Wąchock, Białogon and Małachów, where – he says – “I worked for the entire period of the revolution as a revenue master and had all arms manufacturing plants under my supervision.” Colette specialised in gunstock manufacturing, and he improved his practical skills at his family’s Firearm and Melee Weapon Factory at Warsaw’s Powązki, where – together with his brother Egidiusz – from 1827 to 1847, he manufactured rifles, pistols, backwords, swords, pikes and knives.

Another interesting story is connected with the person of Piotr Michałowski. A private collection holds a gift sword which was to be presented to the artist, in recognition of his industrial achievement at Białogon, by John Fown Pace. Pace was an English mechanic who installed imported machine tools and drills. Yet the gift

was never presented as the English engineer died a tragic death, caught in the machine’s cogwheels.

Foreign specialists were merging with the Polish community. The son of the above-mentioned John Pace settled down at Mstyczów in the Jędrzejów district. William Preacher, a Scottish engineer, connected with the Białogon Plant, produced farming machinery in Congress Poland and died in Warsaw. Karol Henryk Kaden, another Białogon employee, settled down with his family at Zgórsko near Kielce. The Head of the Central Mining Directorate and the Academic School of Mining in Kielce, Jan Ullman, lived in our city and was buried at Jaworznia, where he had been extracting copper and lead ores. The list is endless.

So, in the first half of the nineteenth century, ours was not a completely homogenous community, which in due time would become invaluable for the history of Kielce and the region.

Dr Jan Główna
The Kielce History Museum
www.muzeumhistoriikielc.pl